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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Plot Thickens

The prosecutor in the trial of the plot to kill the pope has dropped a bombshell: Mehmet Ali Agca had already committed one murder on behalf of the Bulgarians before shooting Pope John Paul II in 1981. While we don't know if prosecutor Antonio Marini will seek convictions for the three Bulgarian defendants, the question now is not whether there was a Bulgarian connection but when it began.

Evidence introduced in Rome last week from Turkish trial records shows that Agca was first recruited by the Bulgarians to assassinate Turkish newspaper editor Abdi Ipekci in 1979. When Agca was arrested and imprisoned, the Bulgarians managed to spring him from a Turkish jail. Mr. Marini asked, "Could it not be that Bulgaria had further plans for Agca back in 1979?" Far from being a Moslem fanatic or simply a right-wing Grey Wolf terrorist, there is increasing evidence that Agca has been an agent of Bulgaria for years. A Bulgarian-ordered murder of Mr. Ipekci is also entirely consistent with everything known about communist subversion of Turkey in the 1970s.

This most recent evidence comes from a deposition by one Dogan Yildirim, who shared a cell with Agca after the Ipekci killing. Mr. Marini introduced into evidence a deposition Yildirim gave on Nov. 18, 1985, to Turkish authorities investigating the journalist's murder. Yildirim described how the communists managed to free Agca. The Bulgarian contact was a prisoner, Atilla Serpil, who belonged to a "leftist-Marxist formation." According to Yildirim, Serpil said he got the orders to get Agca out of prison from "a person named Aleks in the office of the cultural attache of the Bulgarian Embassy." He was provided with two guns. The first escape attempt failed, but a second attempt a few weeks later succeeded and Agca was off to Sofia, Bulgaria.

Yildirim also testified that Agca and Serpil "worked in connection with

the Kintex firm in Bulgaria," the country's import-export agency. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency says Kintex is the main supplier of drugs to Western Europe. Turkey estimates that Kintex, while smuggling drugs out of Turkey, smuggled \$1 billion of guns and other arms into it between 1975 and 1980. These weapons went to both left- and right-wing terrorists. Killings such as the Ipekci murder helped topple the democratic government of Turkey, a longtime strategic goal of the Soviet Bloc. Agca apparently was originally recruited for smuggling drugs and weapons, and killed Mr. Ipekci after training in a Lebanese PLO camp.

Bulgaria's link to Agca was Abuzer Ugurlu, the notorious leader of the drug-running Turkish mafia who's now a defendant in the Turkish trial for the Ipekci killing. U.S. intelligence says Ugurlu has been a Bulgarian agent since 1974. Agca admitted to Turkish investigators in 1983 that Ugurlu recruited him for the Ipekci killing. Interestingly, Yildirim has also shared a cell with Ugurlu, which may be how he got his information about Agca's Bulgarian link. The likely chain of events is that Ugurlu, acting on Bulgarian orders, selected Agca to kill Mr. Ipekci, helped spring Agca from prison and then handed Agca to Sofia for his next assignment. The Ipekci murder was Agca's screen test for the pope shooting.

Mr. Marini told the Rome jury how Agca, after escaping from prison, spent the summer of 1980 in four hotels in Sofia. But the Bulgarians, Mr. Marini said, denied for months that Agca had ever been in Sofia. He told the jury that the Bulgarians continue to withhold information, which makes it hard to prove the guilt of the three Bulgarian defendants. On Monday, Mr. Marini asked for a life sentence for Oral Celik, who was the second gunman in St. Peter's Square. The three Bulgarians are accused of paying Agca and Celik for the shooting,

supervising them in Rome and arranging for their planned escape using a special Bulgarian diplomatic truck. The escape plan was aborted when Agca was apprehended just after the shooting.

Mr. Marini is scheduled to announce this week whether he will ask for convictions of the Bulgarian defendants, only one of whom, Sergei Antonov, is in Italian custody. Agca attacked his own credibility throughout the trial, so Mr. Marini must rely on circumstantial evidence to prove Bulgarian involvement. But even if the verdict is a "dismissal for want of sufficient evidence," the Italian system does not prohibit double jeopardy, and the Bulgarians may again find themselves facing Italian charges.

This trial is not the end of the story, whatever the verdict. Italy's three most senior anti-terrorist magistrates have begun another investigation into the pope shooting. They will look further into Soviet Bloc involvement in the crime. Despite Soviet Bloc denials and disinformation, the persistence by the Italian judiciary looks more and more like an old-fashioned victory for truth and justice.